

What is claimed is:

1. A camera that controls exposure of an image sensor in such a way that apparent brightness of a subject in a photographed picture is substantially constant regardless of actual brightness of the subject,

wherein the camera controls the exposure of the image sensor according to a result of distinguishing among a first condition in which there is little difference in brightness between the subject and a background, a second condition in which there is much difference in brightness between the subject and the background and in which the subject is less bright than the background, and a third condition in which there is much difference in brightness between the subject and the background and in which the subject is brighter than the background.

2. A camera as claimed in claim 1,

wherein the camera first distinguishes between a fourth condition including the first and second conditions and a fifth condition including the first and third conditions, and then distinguishes, when the fourth condition has been recognized, between the first and second conditions or, when the fifth condition has been recognized, between the first and third conditions.

3. A camera as claimed in claim 2,

wherein an area to be photographed is divided into two, an upper and a lower, portions each further divided into a plurality of regions, and the camera determines brightness in each of those regions and then determines an upper-portion average, which is an average of brightness in the regions belonging to the upper portion, and a lower-portion average, which is an average of brightness in the regions belonging to the lower portion, so that the camera

recognizes the fourth condition when an upper-portion/lower-portion ratio, which is a ratio of the upper-portion average to the lower-portion average, is higher than a predetermined reference upper-portion/lower-portion ratio and recognizes the fifth condition when the upper-portion/lower-portion ratio is not higher than the reference upper-portion/lower-portion ratio.

4. A camera as claimed in claim 3,

wherein the reference upper-portion/lower-portion ratio is made lower when the second condition was recognized last time than when the first or third condition was recognized.

5. A camera as claimed in claim 3,

wherein the camera determines an overall average, which is an average of brightness over all the regions, a first dark-region average, which is an average of brightness in regions in which brightness is lower than the overall average, and a second dark-region average, which is an average of brightness in regions in which brightness is lower than the first dark-region average so that, when the fourth condition has been recognized, the camera recognizes the first condition when a first overall/dark-region ratio, which is a ratio of the overall average to the first dark-region average, is not higher than a first reference overall/dark-region ratio or when a second overall/dark-region ratio, which is a ratio of the overall average to the second dark-region average, is not higher than a second reference overall/dark-region ratio and recognizes the second condition when the first overall/dark-region ratio is higher than the first reference overall/dark-region ratio and in addition the second overall/dark-region ratio is higher than the second reference overall/dark-region ration.

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6. A camera as claimed in claim 5,

wherein the first and second reference overall/dark-region ratios are made lower when the second condition was recognized last time than when the first condition was recognized.

7. A camera as claimed in claim 3,

wherein the camera determines an overall average, which is an average of brightness over all the regions, a dark-region average, which is an average of brightness in regions in which brightness is lower than the overall average, and a bright-region average, which is an average of brightness in regions in which brightness is higher than the overall average so that, when the fifth condition has been recognized, the camera recognizes the first condition when a bright-region/dark-region ratio, which is a ratio of the bright-region average to the dark-region average, is not higher than a predetermined reference bright-region/dark-region ratio and recognizes the third condition when the bright-region/dark-region ratio is higher than the reference bright-region/dark-region ratio.

8. A camera as claimed in claim 7,

wherein the reference bright-region/dark-region ratio is made lower when the third condition was recognized last time than when the first condition was recognized.

9. A camera as claimed in claim 1,

wherein an area to be photographed is divided into a plurality of regions, and the camera determines brightness in each of those regions and then determines an overall average, which is an average of brightness over all the regions, a first dark-region average, which is an average of brightness in regions in which brightness is lower than the overall average, a

second dark-region average, which is an average of brightness in regions in which brightness is lower than the first dark-region average, a first bright-region average, which is an average of brightness in regions in which brightness is higher than the overall average, and a second bright-region average, which is an average of brightness in regions in which brightness is higher than the first bright-region average so that

the camera controls the exposure of the image sensor by using, as the brightness of the subject, the overall average when the first condition is recognized, the second dark-region average when the second condition is recognized, and the second bright-region average when the third condition is recognized.

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